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## **WATER POLLUTION:**

### **EPA expresses new concerns over Ariz. copper mine**

Manuel Quiñones, E&E reporter

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U.S. EPA is expressing strong concerns about the water quality impacts of the proposed Rosemont copper mine roughly 30 miles south of Tucson, Ariz.

EPA, which has long been critical of permitting for the sprawling project, recently blasted an Arizona Department of Environmental Quality Clean Water Act Section 401 certification this year.

The mine's footprint would affect 1,000 acres of private land in the Santa Rita Mountains and more than 3,600 acres of the Coronado National Forest.

"After careful review and consultation with the state, EPA has determined that the impacts of the project include substantial water quality aspects that may be outside of the state's [Section] 401 certification review," EPA Region 9 Administrator Jared Blumenfeld wrote last month in a letter released by project opponents this week.

"Thus, EPA believes that certification alone is unlikely to provide sufficient measures to safeguard the water quality of the Cienega Creek watershed," Blumenfeld said, "including stream reaches meeting or exceeding existing water quality standards."

Blumenfeld penned his missive to Col. Kim Colloton, Los Angeles district engineer for the Army Corps of Engineers. He urged the corps to further scrutinize Rosemont when deciding whether to grant the project a required Clean Water Act Section 404 dredge-and-fill permit.

Blumenfeld said permitting documents "concluded that the Rosemont mine, if constructed, would adversely modify surface and groundwater hydrology, sediment transport and pollutant loadings in the watershed."

He added that state certification "lacks sufficient, specific preventative actions to avoid these adverse impacts to water quality, creating a substantial risk to designated beneficial use standards set by the state for Davidson Canyon and Cienega Creek."

Blumenfeld had also warned the corps over Rosemont in 2012. "At this time," he said then, "we respectfully reaffirm our objections on the basis that permit approval will have substantial and unacceptable impacts to aquatic resources of national importance."

EPA has the power to veto Section 404 permits issued by the corps. While EPA has only done so 13 times, recent actions have caused significant controversy.

The Forest Service issued a final environmental impact statement on the project in late 2014.

But last May, Colloton expressed concerns about mitigation measures for Rosemont. And just a few days later, the Fish and Wildlife Service said it needed to further scrutinize the project's potential impacts on wildlife, throwing a wrench into the permitting process (*Greenwire*, May 23, 2014).

Rosemont leaders have said the permitting snags are part of the back-and-forth process between companies and agencies. And they blast environmentalists for opposing a project that could generate 10 percent of U.S. copper production.

Toronto-based Hudbay Minerals Inc., which bought Rosemont last year, told investors in a recent regulatory filing, "Acquiring control of [the project] allows the Group an opportunity to develop the Rosemont project and significantly increase Hudbay's future copper production."

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